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SUBJECT: NORTHERN CAPE OFFERS CHANCES FOR OPPOSITION

Classified By: Consul General Alberta Mayberry, Reason 1.4 (b)

11. (C) Support for South Africa's political opposition appears strong in the sparsely populated, but geographically huge, Northern Cape province, and opposition parties could see their best provincial showing there outside the Western Cape. As elsewhere, the ruling African National Congress's tremendous organizational and funding advantages suggest it probably will not lose power in the province, but even ANC officials admit the ruling party is prepared to lose support in comparison to the 68 percent support the ANC won in 2004 national elections due to the formation of the ANC splinter Congress of the People (COPE) opposition party. Pol/Econoff spent the first week of April traveling around the province speaking with political parties and other observers on the upcoming election. End summary.

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PROVINCIAL DEMOGRAPHICS  
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12. (U) The hot, largely arid Northern Cape constitutes slightly more than 30 percent of South Africa's land mass, an area slightly larger than Germany. Much of the province's economic activity centers on the mining sector, particularly diamond production in the capital of Kimberley and iron around Sishen, while tourism and agriculture -- notably grape production on the Orange River -- are playing a growing role. Most of the province, however, is a desolate landscape largely unsuited to human settlement.

13. (U) The harshness of this environment is the reason why this large province contains just over 1 million people, just over 2 percent of South Africa's population. Racially, approximately 53 percent of the populace is colored (the South African appellation for mixed race), while 34 percent is black and 13 percent white. Most of the black population lives in the eastern part of the province, particularly around Kimberley, the province's largest city.

14. (SBU) Politically, Northern Cape has moved increasingly toward the ANC since the 1994 transition to majority rule. The ANC won just 50 percent of the provincial vote in the 1994 poll, with the old National Party taking over 40 percent. In 1999, however, the ANC upped its total to 64 percent -- the New National Party took just 25 percent -- while it won 69 percent in 2004. Johan du Plessis, editor of Kimberley's Diamond Fields Advertiser, chalks up the ANC's growth to generally solid performance in government, as well as the NNP's demise, which left Afrikaans-speaking voters, both white and colored, without a natural political home outside the ANC.

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COPE-ANC SPLIT WILL BE DEFINING ELECTION ISSUE  
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15. (C) Du Plessis and other observers told Pol/Econoff that battle between COPE and the ANC will be the defining political battle in this campaign. Several high-level ANC officials -- notably ANC provincial secretary Neville Mompoti and Finance MEC (provincial minister) Pakes Dikgetsi -- have defected to COPE, and du Plessis said COPE has generated unprecedented excitement among voters. Although he noted there is no scientific way to measure support for COPE or any

other party, du Plessis noted that when he puts a COPE headline on his front page, he sells up to 2,000 more newspapers than normal. A picture of Jacob Zuma, by contrast, makes no dent in sales.

16. (C) The split in the provincial ANC was largely along the lines of Mbeki supporters versus Zuma supporters. Mompoti, for example, was one of Mbeki's strongest supporters at the Qfor example, was one of Mbeki's strongest supporters at the December 2007 Polokwane conference, whereas current ANC provincial leader John Block has long been identified in the Zuma camp. Du Plessis opined that Mbeki's September 2008 ouster as national President meant the writing was on the wall for his supporters, which was why several leading Mbeki backers jumped to COPE after its November formation. The only notable exception is provincial Premier Dipuo Peters, a well-known Mbeki supporter who was landed at number 40 on the ANC's national list to go to Parliament. Du Plessis noted that Peters is tremendously popular in the province -- and probably the country's most popular premier -- due to her openness and transparency. Her popularity, as well as her willingness to back the new ANC leadership, will save her political career.

17. (C) Du Plessis described Northern Cape as a collection of small, closely-knit communities in which personality politics are more important than more urbanized provinces. Hence, the defection of Mompoti -- one of the province's most popular politicians -- is likely to prove a huge benefit to COPE. No other opposition party has provincial leaders with similarly high profiles. The ANC's trump card, du Plessis noted, is likely to be former Agriculture MEC Tina Joemat-Pettersson, who tops the party's regional list to go to Parliament. Du Plessis noted that Joemat-Pettersson, a Zuma backer, is extremely popular among the province's colored community, a huge asset in the predominantly colored province. Her popularity, combined with Block's somewhat surprisingly low profile in recent months, has given rise to speculation that she, not Block, will become provincial premier.

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ANC OFFICIAL CONFIDENT, BUT NOT EFFUSIVE  
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18. (C) Patrick Montwedi, the ANC's provincial election coordinator, told Pol/Econoff on April 6 that while he was confident the ANC would prevail in Northern Cape, he did not think it would be by a large margin. Montwedi -- who sounded more like a COPE sympathizer than a dedicated ANC cadre -- said the party was officially targeting 70 percent of the vote in the province, he thought COPE's formation would prevent this. Defectees to COPE from the ANC took a great deal of organizational skill along with them, and Montwedi said Mompoti's popularity is problematic for the ANC.

19. (C) Montwedi also lamented the ANC's long-term prospects in the province. Provincial structures have been weakened not only by COPE's rise, but by longstanding infighting among ANC factions. He noted that the provincial Youth League in particular was largely inactive, and that most educated, mature young people tended to be siding with COPE (a sentiment echoed by du Plessis). Montwedi opined that party leaders were more concerned with personal betterment and jockeying for positions, something that was turning off young voters. ANC local councilors are also a liability for the party, as they are largely uneducated and do their jobs poorly.

110. (C) Still, Montwedi did not think the ANC would lose Northern Cape. The ANC is still the only party with a presence in every ward in the province, and it retains significant support among black voters in the more urban eastern part of the province. Montwedi acknowledged that the Namakwa and Siyanda (Upington) district municipalities would be troublesome, as many rural colored voters are antagonistic toward Zuma, but they probably would not be enough to tip the province away from the ANC. However, Montwedi said that he personally hoped that the ANC would lose support in Northern

Cape, as "this party needs a wakeup call." (Note: Montwedi seemed quite broken up about the ANC's split. He said former Finance MEC Dikgetsi was his closest friend and the best man at his wedding; his defection to COPE has caused a strain in their relationship. End note.)

¶11. (C) To gin up support, the ANC will rely heavily on its alliance allies in the province, particularly the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). COSATU provincial secretary William Sikali told Pol/Econoff on April 7 that the provincial organization -- which numbers about 57,000 members -- is mobilizing all available resources to back the ANC in the province. Sikali showed Pol/Econoff a 15-page handout that listed over 100 COSATU activities in March and April, primarily public meetings organized by COSATU shop stewards. Sikali said that although COSATU has issues with the ANC's provincial leadership -- particularly its refusal to consult with organized labor -- he was confident this would improve under new party leaders. Sikali also noted that COSATU was well represented on the ANC's provincial and regional lists, Qwell represented on the ANC's provincial and regional lists, with 12 COSATU members among the 35 names on the two lists.

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COPE: IF ONLY THERE WERE MORE TIME AND MONEY...  
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¶12. (C) COPE provincial spokesman Fezile Kies told Pol/Econoff on April 6 that the party was confident of a good showing, but admitted that outright victory was unlikely. COPE does not have the resources to compete with the ANC, and six months was simply not enough time for the party to electioneer in such a large province. Kies believed the party would be in much better shape by the end of 2009, but that won't be of much use for this poll. Rather, the party hopes to continue growing to effectively challenge in the 2011 local elections.

¶13. (C) Kies said that despite the ANC's tremendous advantages in terms of money and manpower, he was confident that COPE would perform well, possibly taking more than 20 percent of the vote. He pointed to COPE's strong showings in recent municipal by-elections, and he noted that COPE would have done even better if the ANC had not been liberally handing out food parcels to voters.

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REST OF OPPOSITION A MIXED BAG  
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¶14. (C) Members of the other significant opposition parties -- the Democratic Alliance, Independent Democrats, and Freedom Front Plus -- expressed limited opposition about the poll, although all noted they are concentrating on limited constituencies. Marlene Viljoen, a Democratic Alliance organizer in Kimberley, and Patricia Coutts, a candidate for the provincial legislature, told Pol/Econoff that while the party was confident of its support among white voters, it was less sure of other races. Coutts said the DA has largely given up on seeking black votes in the province, preferring to concentrate on bolstering colored support, which was more plentiful and less expensive to court.

¶15. (C) Meanwhile, Independent Democrats provincial leader Mohammed Desai said the ID was using its limited resources on bolstering support among its traditional bastion of support, rural colored voters. He felt confident of ID support, particularly in the rural west of the province, but like other parties bemoaned has lack of resources. Lastly, Freedom Front provincial leader Carel Boshoff said his party had modest goals for this poll, particularly holding onto its one seat in the provincial legislature. He acknowledged that the party had little chance of expanding its white Afrikaans-speaking base, so the status quo was sufficient for now.

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ANC DOMINATES THE RESOURCE GAME  
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¶16. (C) It was clear in discussions with party officials, as well as through observation throughout the province, that the ANC is dominating the money game. When asked by Pol/Econoff, Montwedi said the ANC's provincial budget was approximately R5 million (about \$500,000). DA organizers, by contrast, said they were working with slightly more than R1 million, while COPE, the ID, and Freedom Front all said they were looking at around R500,000. The smaller parties in particular said these budgets were totally inadequate, as the province's large size meant transport costs ate up a great deal of their campaign budgets.

¶17. (C) In driving around the province, particularly between Kimberley and Upington, the ANC's dominance was quite evident. While all five of the leading parties had posters in most settled areas, the ANC had advantages in terms of billboards, branded cars and taxis, and t-shirts. COPE did have four billboards in Kimberley (at R13,000 per month, according to Kies) and a newly branded COPE bus, but this was insignificant in comparison to the ANC presence. Opposition parties also lamented that on election day, the ANC will be able to hire taxis to bring voters to the polls, something smaller parties will be hard pressed to do.

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COMMENT  
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¶18. (C) A recent national poll put ANC support in the Northern Cape at 72 percent, more than any other province in the country. All parties and observers rubbished this figure; as du Plessis noted, the Northern Cape's rural nature and homogeneous communities make it nearly impossible for pollsters to accurately convey the mood here without expensive door-to-door surveys. The ANC does seem set to win the province, given its tremendous advantages, but a decline from the 69 percent it received in 2004 appears a near certainty.

MAYBERRY